

## ORGANIZATION OF THE ROYAL ARTILLERY.

BY A FIELD OFFICER OF THE CORPS.

[From the United Service Magazine.]

The system of uniting the two duties of the gunner and the driver in the Royal Artillery, and recognizing as a general principle, free from any but very rare individual exceptions, that the same man can be taught to drive a pair of horses after the manner of a position, at no very rapid rate, and to perform the very simple and easily acquired duty of sponging and serving a gun, is at the present moment, after existing for a considerable number of years, and having its advantages fully tested and demonstrated during the late war, seriously threatened in its continuance. On what grounds this is being done, or by what reasons the authorities are influenced, it is difficult to understand. The new system to be substituted for the old one, would appear to be that a company of artillery, on taking over a field battery, is to have a number of men of short stature attached to it for the purpose of acting as drivers. On the completion of the course of field instruction, these short men are to be turned over to the relieving company, and commence again under a new set of officers; so that, in fact, our field artillery will be made up of two sets of men, the one permanently attached to horses, in whom the officers have only a temporary interest, and the other of gunners, whose duties will be considerably cramped, and their usefulness diminished by the new arrangement. The company of artillery will be no longer complete in itself and equal, wherever it may be quartered, to meet, as it used to do, any exigency which the nature of our colonial empire might require from it. The new system will be one of continual making and breaking up—of making a company perfect in its field duties, and, as soon as it is so, taking the essential drivers away from it and pulling it to pieces again. The regiment will consist of two parts, neither of which can act alone, and both of which may not be together when the case requires it. There will, moreover, when they are together, be a divided interest from beginning to end. There can be no feeling of comradeship between men whose duties are made to appear decidedly different, and who know they are only associated together for a limited period; the gunners will feel no interest in horses which are to be exclusively ridden or driven by a different class of men; the drivers will think, and most likely very properly think, that the horses and harness are as much as they need trouble themselves about, and that they have no concern in the guns or in the preservation of the stores of the battery generally; the officers and non-commissioned officers will certainly not be inclined to favour the unhappy driver, who is only temporarily attached to them, and whose services in action will always bear the character of being of secondary consideration.

It may possibly be intended, by retaining the designation of gunner and driver in common to all artillerymen, that all are to be, as at present, instructed in driving; but it is evident that if men exclusively instructed as drivers are attached to batteries, none others but these, except in very exceptional cases, will be much practised in that part of an artilleryman's duty. It cannot be otherwise on the face of it, for few of those short men are physically equal to the service of a 9-pounder gun; the compel the necessity, therefore, of keeping the gunners for their own work only.

The old plan was by far the best in every respect. By it the men of a company, on taking over a field battery, were divided into three classes of drivers according to their capabilities, as to appearance or in other respects, for that duty. They were all instructed as gunners. The men of the first class of drivers were considered as those more or less permanently attached to horses as long as the company remained in battery; the second and third class men were what is technically called "off men." By having these as far as possible always mounted at watering order, and by giving them instruction in riding drill, they soon obtained fair seats and entire confidence on horseback. Whenever the first class driver was sick, or on furlough, or "in trouble," off men took his place. In the course of time, where time was allowed, every man in the battery became more or less a driver, and it was constantly falling to him 's discharge that duty. He was equally as good a gunner, and the company of artillery was thus complete within itself, and if quartered at the Cape or elsewhere, on being required for field duties, could take over a battery without waiting for any aid as to drivers from home. Having completed the course of field instruction, it went back to its dismounted duties, carrying with it all the advantages of that instruction, and it gave way to others, who in turn progressed in the same way. A knowledge of field duties—in the care of horses, and in riding and driving, as well as in serving field guns—became disseminated throughout the corps, and a power was obtained of turning the whole of it into field artillery, if such was required. This was the theory of the old system, and it required nothing but a very moderate establishment of batteries to carry it out. This establishment, before the war, was always denied, or, in the more showy exhibitions of the horse brigade, it was neglected. The consequence was that, when the war broke out, nothing in the shape of a field artillery existed at all. The apathy and indifference of the artillery authorities on this subject has never met with its deserts, and now, when a liberal establishment of field batteries has been granted, the same parties are giving their countenance to changes which will cramp the arm and lead to nothing but mischief. It is, perhaps, unreasonable to expect much that is practical from men who have never been actively employed for more than fifty years, or from others who have never seen any service before an enemy at all; but it is of these materials that the principal authorities of this important arm, are almost solely made up. With officers who run from one staff appointment to another, scarcely wearing their uniform from year's end to year's end, discharging duties confined entirely to their desks, it is not to be expected that much progress can be made. The practical officers are kept where their knowledge of the service and its requirements are of no use, and the theoretical officers (the officers of the old school of service, or of no service at all) are where the practical officers should be.

The tide of administrative reform, wherever else it may have reached, has not yet arrived at artillery subjects. There is hardly an officer who had any real experience or opportunity of judging in the late war of the gunner and driver system, with all the disadvantages under which it labored by an imperfect establishment during peace, who would desire to see it changed. A few very old or very inexperienced officers only are opposed to it, and desire a permanent corps of drivers, or they wish some change which

would be neither the one thing nor the other, which would have all artillerymen called gunners and drivers, while the duties of both are kept distinct and separate. Let the gunner and driver system, at all events, have a fair trial given to it before it is condemned. The fact of its having been established by the Duke of Wellington, as most suitable for England, after his long experience in what war required, and of its having been stamped with the emphatic approval of Sir Alexander Dickson, who was by far the most practical and experienced, as well as intelligent artillery officer that England has ever had, should at least obtain this for it. Let a field battery of artillery remain four years or thereabouts at its work on the gunner and driver system, and then let it be seen what it can do; but let us not set a system aside or disturb it in its integrity which offers so many advantages without some practical test of this kind. The field batteries in Canada under General Campbell some years ago, show what might be done with a fair period for instruction on the plan which it is now sought to condemn.

A system based on the authority of officers so eminent as these mentioned, should not be shaken or disturbed but on the clearest and most positive testimony as to its defects. It can never be that it should be set aside for the old driver corps, for which, after the actual experience of a long war, it was deliberately substituted; and still less that it should give way to such a plan as that now apparently about to be acted upon—a plan which will do more to destroy the zeal of the officers and create dislike to the service among the non-commissioned officers and men than any other that could possibly be devised. How the number of short men to be attached to the batteries are to be regulated so as to have sufficient spare ones to meet every casualty arising from sickness or other causes on service has never yet been stated. Nor is it laid down in peace or in war what is to be done with spare short men who are not wanted.

A separate body of men as drivers are kept for the horse artillery, but as this part of the service is maintained on a scale of expense which indicates it as a show corps, especially in peace,\* nothing intended for the practical wants of the service can be argued from it. But even in this part of the service the number of spare drivers did not suffice to meet the casualties by sickness in Bulgaria, and the result was that the reserve companies of foot artillery had to give gunners and drivers to act for them. Nothing can show in a stronger light the advantages of the latter system than their capability to do this. A minute manual dexterity might be gained in the artillery by the division of labour, but that minute dexterity is not necessary, and to obtain it the most important advantages in other respects must be sacrificed. It is only going a step further to say that every man at a gun should be kept to certain distinct duties, and not instructed alike in all, as to argue that a man cannot, generally speaking, perform the duties of a gunner and driver. If our field artillery are always to carry their knapsacks, as has been recently ordered,

\* As an instance of this, it is only necessary to state that on a rumour of an expected outbreak at the Cape in the course of last summer, a battery of artillery was required. It was necessary to equip it on the detachment system, the same as the horse artillery. Why, if the latter are of any use, was not a troop sent?—The Guards went to Canada and in the expedition to Portugal. The horse artillery never left England in the interval from 1815 until 1854.